

AN ADDRESS
TO THE
PIONEER AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF THE COUNTY OF YORK

ON THE EXHIBITION GROUNDS, TORONTO, JUNE 18, 1891

BY
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President of the Society.

TORONTO:
OFFICE OF THE WEEK.
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AN ADDRESS.

IT is proper that some explanation should be given of the variation in the practice of our Society which has this year taken place.

The practice of our Society has hitherto been to make its annual holiday the occasion of an excursion to some city or town situated within a convenient distance from Toronto. Hamilton has been visited by us in this way, and Guelph, Peterboro, Brantford, Brampton, Niagara and Orillia. Of all these places we have very pleasant recollections connected with our annual outing, having received in every one of them a most kind and cordial public welcome at the hands of the Mayor and Corporation of those several places respectively.

But at the present year we have thought it desirable to make an exception to our rule. The year 1891 is to us in the Province of Ontario a centennial year, and we thought it would be fitting that we should mark its occurrence by keeping our annual holiday here at home, as it were, in Toronto, the Capital of the Province.

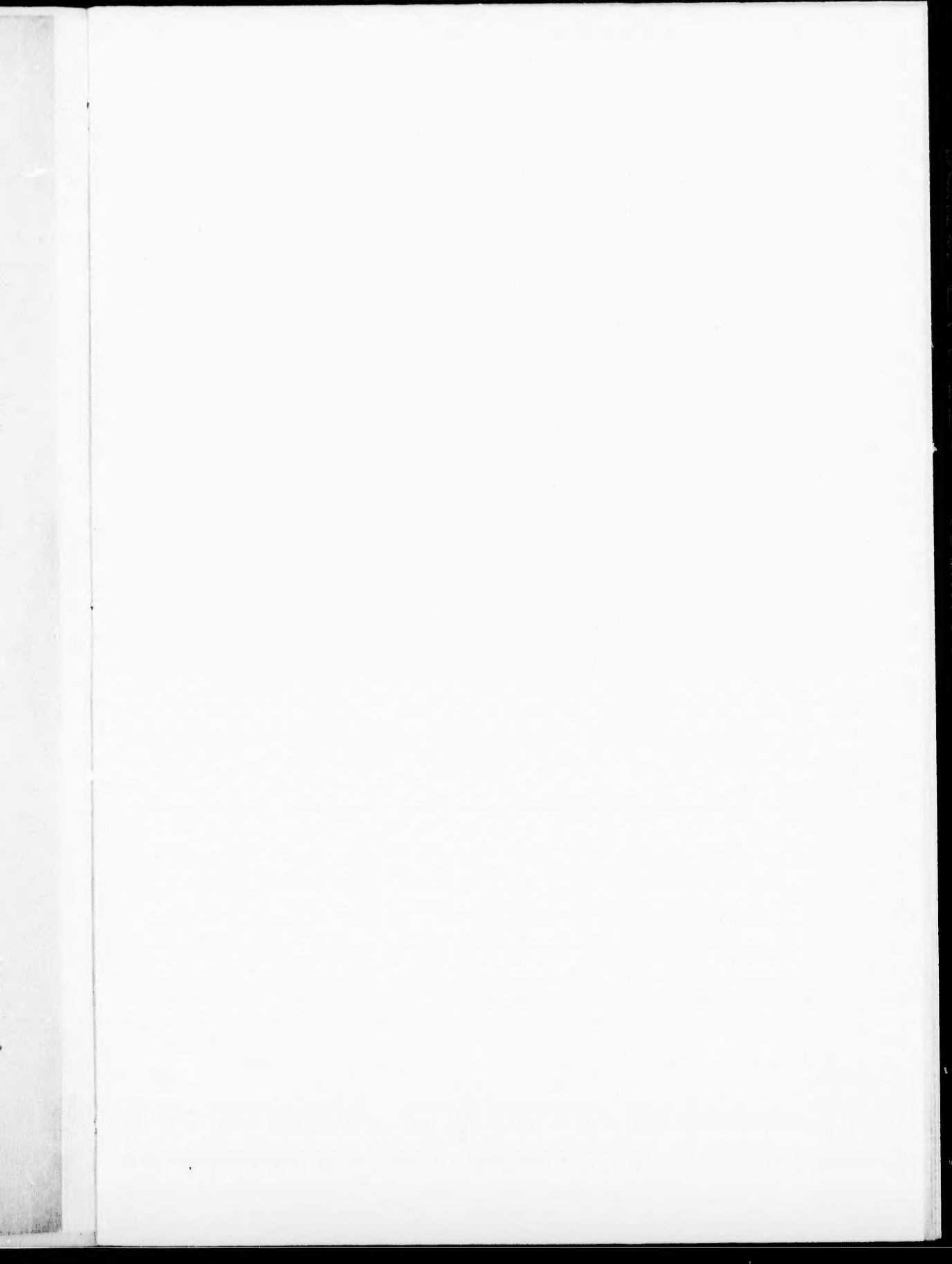
The year 1891 is the 100th anniversary of the existence of this Province, regarding it as being identical with the old Province of Upper Canada, which it certainly is in fact.

In the year 1791 was passed by the Imperial Parliament of Great Britain the famous Act which divided the ancient Province of Quebec into the two distinct Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada, which Act passed its third reading on May 18th, 1791. The arrangements prescribed in that Act

were carried into effect in the following year by the summoning of the first Parliament of Upper Canada, which was opened by Governor Simcoe with a Speech from the Throne at Niagara, the 17th September, 1792.

We hope that you all fully concur with us in our considering it appropriate that we should as a Pioneer and Historical Society distinguish the present year in the manner which we have done. We are living in a period of centennials as it were. It is curious to find ourselves making common use of such dates as 1891, 1892-93 and so forth, which sound in some manner so familiar to us already. Our grandfathers, who lived among the stirring events of 1792, The Reign of Terror; 1793, Decapitation of Louis XVI. and his Queen; 1796, Napoleon's first appearance on the scene. Those dates are so powerfully impressed on the minds of us, their grandchildren, that it seems quite start'ling to find ourselves living in years whose dates have a look and sound so similar. Let us congratulate ourselves and be thankful that the times in which we live are in many respects better than those which kept our forefathers 100 years ago so long in a state of apprehension and unrest.

One other centenary just about to occur, suggested by the group of dates to which I have referred, must not be omitted—the centenary of the city of Toronto itself. In 1793, the city of Toronto, under the name of York, was first surveyed and laid out on paper under the immediate inspection of Governor Simcoe, and in 1794 it began its actual existence in the form of a few buildings constructed of hewn logs or framed timber, bricks and mortar being used solely in the erection of chimneys and ovens and in a basement or two where greater importance was aimed at. It goes without saying, that we shall all observe the year 1892 as a centennial, occurring for the fourth time of the discovery of our continent by Columbus.



It is very pleasant to see the assemblage which is gathered together here on the present occasion. It expresses the warm fellow-feeling which you have in regard to the object which our Society aims to accomplish.

As a Pioneer and Historical Society we are banded together and incorporated for the preservation of the memory and actions of the sturdy enterprising men who gave the first start to the agriculture, the commerce, the education, the military defence, and the jurisprudence of this country.

A well-known old Roman poet has said that there were plenty of brave men before Agamemnon, but their fame and example have been lost to posterity because they did not happen to have a chronicler and sacred bard that Agamemnon was so fortunate as to meet with.

We desire to prevent the utter oblivion of the organizers and first followers of our country who did such good service in the past for us, their descendants. The same task which we have undertaken for the county of York and city of Toronto has been undertaken by the pioneer and historical societies which have lately been founded in several other counties of Ontario, and which we hope will ere long be founded in every one of the counties of Ontario.

The report of the proceedings at Brampton a few weeks ago of the General Pioneer and Historical Society of Ontario is very cheering in this respect. Of that Society we have in the present assemblage several representatives who will in due course address us. What all the societies of this description aim at is that the memory and example of our brave men in the past, our pioneers and founders of communities, should not be utterly lost. Our pioneer and historical societies are to furnish the chroniclers who are not to allow the achievements and wisdom of our worthy forefathers to perish—chroniclers

either in prose or verse ; and already the good work has begun.

In numerous special papers that have been read from time to time at gatherings of our historical societies, most valuable records have been made of Canadian local history in prose, and talented bards have not been wanting to sing of our heroic past as witness a Kirby, a Mair, and others, among them an honoured member of our own Toronto Society here present, Mrs. Curzon. All primitive annals, sacred as well as secular, derive much of their charm from narratives and documents, homely, miscellaneous, and often metrical in form, resembling those which the local writers referred to have put together and given to the world.

Members of the Local Government have expressed a willingness to help forward a scheme for preserving family manuscripts and fugitive documents bearing on the early history of the country, likely otherwise to be irretrievably lost. It is possible that in this way a volume may from time to time be printed containing very valuable and most interesting matter. It will be our duty to unite in pressing upon the Government the execution of some such plan. Many papers and documents now in the possession of our societies may thus be permanently en-registered and several pieces that have already been committed to print, but which from their isolation are still in some danger of being lost, may be printed again ; I refer to such documents as Major Littlehale's journal and Governor Simcoe's letter to Sir Joseph Bankes, both published not long since by myself, the interesting journal of Surveyor-General Ridout, to be seen in Mrs. Edgar's lately published work, the journal of Hon. Alexander Macdonnell kept during the first exploratory tour to Matchedash Bay and Penetanguishene in 1793, and other documents of a similar description not yet in print. In the Crown Lands Department of Ontario the Field Notes and other

manuscript of the pioneer land surveyor, Augustus Jones, are still preserved, which would all prove of a widespread public interest could they once be made to see the light through the public press.

Members of the Local Government have likewise expressed a willingness to establish in some fitting place a museum of relics other than these literary ones, illustrative of our past and pioneer life generally. This is an idea which we must all feel pleased to promote.

Already has such an idea been broached in our Society for the County of York, and in fact we have made a slight commencement of such a collection; but I think that the formation of a museum which would be worthy of our Society and of the country at large is much beyond our capability, and it will be the wiser plan to fall in with the Government arrangement, whatever it may prove to be, when convenient quarters will doubtless be found for our collection, together with the collections probably of the other County Pioneer Societies, within the walls possibly of the new Parliament Buildings themselves.

Another project which I confidently trust all our Pioneer and Historical Societies will unite in promoting among themselves, and with the members of the Government, is the speedy erection of a monument to Governor Simcoe, the organizer of the Province of Upper Canada and founder of the city of Toronto,—this monument to be appropriately placed in front of the main entrance to the new Parliament Buildings in the Queen's Park at Toronto.

I have heard it stated that for the execution of such a statue it will be difficult to procure a proper likeness of Governor Simcoe, but this is by no means the case. A copy of the identical likeness which furnished the model for the head of Governor Simcoe on the marble monument erected to his memory in the Cathedral at Exeter, Devonshire, England, was furnished to me some twenty years ago by Capt.

John Kennaway Simcoe, R.N., grandson and lineal representative of Governor Simcoe, from which the fine life-sized portrait of our first Governor was painted for the collection of gubernatorial portraits now adorning the interior of Government House, Toronto. In constructing a model for the statue proposed in front of the Parliament Buildings, no deviation from this most authentic likeness must be permitted. I make this remark because a slight confusion seems to have been created in the minds of some persons of our community, through the existence in London, Ontario, of a portrait in oil supposed to be a likeness of the first Governor of Upper Canada, which differs materially from the portrait furnished me by Capt. Simcoe.

I have at this moment in my pocket express authority in writing from the present representative of the Simcoe family to declare that the oil portrait referred to is, through a mistake, not authentic, and that the only portrait of the first Governor to be recognized is that which was furnished to me some twenty years since by Capt. Simcoe as already stated.*

It is much to be desired that the people of our Canadian London should have in their midst a truthful portrait of Governor Simcoe. It would not be difficult for them to obtain a replica of the excellent painting of the Governor by Berthon, now to be seen in Government House, Toronto.

* Mrs. Simcoe, widow of the late Captain John Kennaway Simcoe of the Royal Navy, writes me as follows from Wulford, near Honiton, Devon, under the date March 30, 1891: And now to answer your question. The picture you mention, and which now hangs in our hall, is not authentic. My late husband detested it. It bears no resemblance to the miniature we sent you from which the medallion in the Cathedral was copied, or to the large picture of the "Three Friends," one of them being General Simcoe as a very young man, the green coat seems the only thing, and even that is not a uniform coat; the flowing hair is hideous, and the face coarse and unpleasant. We entirely repudiate it. And indeed the lady who sent it to Miss Simcoe called it a *miniature*, so we doubt that what she intended should be sent ever came, for no one could describe it as a "*miniature*."

